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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted (1) to determine the effectiveness of a specially designed one-semester basic speech course on the self-image of college students experiencing extreme communication anxiety, and (2) to discover whether a difference existed between the self-image of students who had an external locus of control and those with an internal locus of control. Subjects, 31 students enrolled in the course, completed measures of locus of control and self-image both at the beginning and at the conclusion of the course. Results showed that the course did help students improve their self-image. (FL)

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Communication Anxiety, Self-Image, and Locus of Control

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Communication Anxiety, Self-Image, and Locus of Control

Lois J. McGary and Arlie Muller Parks

It was the intent of the authors to determine the effectiveness of a specially designed one semester basic speech course on the self-image of students who experience extreme communication anxiety. Moreover, the authors wanted to discover whether a difference existed between the self-image of communication anxious students with an external locus of control and those with an internal locus of control. Data was gathered from thirty-one students enrolled in the Alternative Approach section of Speech 101 at Mansfield State College (PA), between 1980 and 1981. The results of this exploratory study justify further research concerning communication anxiety, self-image, and locus of control.

Rationale. McCroskey (1980) defines communication apprehension as "the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (p. 21). Communication apprehensives are viewed as being less skillful communicators; this could be the result of either a deficiency in the apprehensive's communication repertoire or a deficiency in the capacity of the apprehensive to adjust her/his communication behavior so that it is appropriate for the specific situation (Lustig & King, 1980).

Phillips defines reticence as "avoidance of social, verbal interaction. Unwillingness to communicate unless prodded; disposed to be

silent; not inclined to speak freely; reserved" (1965, p. 24). The behavior of the reticent person helps her/him to avoid the communication act. According to Phillips, "reticence could be construed as existing on a continuum with stuttering and stagefright" (1965, p. 24). He maintains, too, that reticence shows a "nosologic category for any communicative disorder which results in reducing the effectiveness of the individual in the normative verbal intercourse demanded by his culture" (1965, p. 28).

We shall refer to the students enrolled in the Alternative Approach section of Speech 101 as "students who experience communication anxiety," in order to include the concepts of both communication apprehension and reticence.

Considerable research on locus of control (Lefcourt, 1976; Phares, 1976) indicates differences in the behavior and perception of individuals based on their locus of control. Since, for example, internals are more likely to grasp and make use of information than externals (Lefcort, 1976), it might be assumed that internals would be more likely to benefit from a course designed to explain and deal with communication anxiety. Thus, locus of control was used as a variable in this study.

Our self-image and self-concept are believed to have a major effect on our behavior as well as our perceptions. How we feel about others depends, in part, on how we feel about ourself (Gergen, 1971). Eric Fromm and Carl Rogers indicate that excessive humility and the inability to accept others is related to low self-esteem and feeling

incapable of reaching our own goals (Gergen, 1971). Those who show a greater acceptance of others tend to have a more positive self-image (Gergen, 1971). Moreover, many studies suggest that social power and a positive self-image are related. Indeed, Gergen (1971) indicates that persons with a positive self-image tend to have more power in social relationships; those with a negative self-image frequently act negatively toward others. Finally, studies by the National Institute of Public Health indicate that low self-esteem is related to having an unrealistic self-image. A great discrepancy between one's ideal self-image and one's actual behavior may result in a poorer self-image (Gibson, 1979). The belief that a poor self-image results in a dislike for others has been supported by studies done at the University of Florida (Gibson, 1979). For these reasons, self-image was included as a variable in this study.

Course Description. The Alternative Approach section of Speech 101 is designed to help students with communication anxiety; it makes extensive use of Phillips' (1977) goal setting approach for helping the reticent student. Those enrolled in the class experience excessive communication anxiety; they enroll of their own accord and by permission of the professor. Their anxiety level is checked by use of a variety of anxiety and communication apprehension measures. The students are asked to identify their communication problems and behaviors. They must also indicate how they would like to communicate. With the help of the professor, they choose specific communication skills and communication settings in which they will carry out their communication

goals. They must identify specific communication behaviors that they will exhibit, as well as those they will not. Most choose asking and answering questions in classes, job interviews, social conversation, and approaching authority figures, as their first goal. Once the goals, specific behaviors, and situations have been defined, the students receive relevant lectures, do reading, and engage in role playing with the professor and her student aides. The students must also practice, outside of class, with the professor or a student aide. The student's performance at these practice sessions is evaluated using the "sandwich technique," by the professor and/or aide. In this technique, a point of praise is given regarding a portion of the task done well, followed by constructive criticism, followed by praise for another portion of the task done well. Students are also encouraged to practice covertly, as well as with a classmate partner, friends, and roommates. The students determine specific times and dates to implement their goals. After each goal has been accomplished, the students turn in a written report describing what happened when they implemented their goal, what went wrong, and, very importantly, what went right. The students complete two such goals of their choice during the course.

In addition, each student is required to take part in a round table discussion and present one five minute informative speech. Much the same approach is used for the speech goal. Students choose their topics, prepare their outlines, and determine the specific skills they want to develop. They are encouraged to engage in limited rehearsal with their partners. Early in their rehearsal period, so they do not

reinforce counter-productive behaviors, they present their speech to a student aide. The aide critiques the speech using the "sandwich technique." When the student aide feels that the student has presented at least a "B" speech, the student then delivers the speech privately in front of the professor. The professor critiques the speech, again using the "sandwich technique." When the student has given at least a "B" speech to the professor, she/he then presents the speech to the class for a grade. The student aides and the professor grade the speech and give the student written critiques.

Using this procedure for the students' goals greatly reduces the chance for failure on the part of these students who experience communication anxiety. This approach provides a variety of situations in which to practice, and the opportunity to eliminate counter-productive behaviors early enough so that the student can practice more positive behaviors before attempting the actual goal or speech. This method gradually desensitizes the student by having her/him begin with the least threatening audience and work up to the most threatening. Furthermore, the student begins with her/his least threatening communication goal, moves to the speech, proceeds to a group discussion, and ends the course by completing a less threatening interpersonal communication goal. Thus, the student leaves the course on a positive note with a feeling of accomplishment.

Communication games and exercises are conducted, in small group settings, throughout the semester during class time. Lecture and individualized instruction is also provided during class time. Shortly

after the semester begins, a compliment, in the form of a "warm fuzzy" is read aloud to a specific student at the end of each class period.

Description of the Study. As was stated earlier, the authors were interested in whether locus of control would be a factor in how effective such a course would be on improving the self-image of students who experience communication anxiety.

Locus of control was determined by the student's score on the Rotter (1966) Internal External Control Scale (REICS). The REICS is a 23 item forced choice questionnaire; the student must select one of two answers. (Reliability for the REICS can be found in Parks' (1977) dissertation.) There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. Students whose scores fell between one and ten were considered internal in locus of control; those scoring between 12 and 23 were considered external in locus of control. A total of 14 externals and 17 internals resulted. Data from the two students who scored 11 on the REICS was not used. This procedure for scoring the REICS was suggested by Rotter (Parks, 1977).

The students also responded to the James and Jongewood Trait Checklist (1971); this instrument was used to determine their self-image. The Trait Checklist contains statements such as: "like myself," "enjoy people," and "people like to be around me." (Reliability estimates for this instrument were not available.) The students checked those statements which they perceived fit their self-image, marked an X by those that did not, and placed a question mark by the statements of which they were unsure. The Trait Checklist was scored by tallying the

number of checks, Xes, or question marks internals and externals placed on each of the statements used in this study. Nine items from the Checklist were analyzed: like myself, don't like myself, afraid or hurt by others, enjoy people, don't like to be around people, people avoid me, people like to be around me, usually say the wrong thing, usually say the right thing. These items were selected because of their obvious relationship to qualities regarded as important for effective communication. The students responded to the Trait Checklist at the beginning of the course and again at the end.

Results. Both externals and internals showed improvement in all areas of self-image considered. Externals were more likely to improve their self-image in some areas, and internals in other areas. In some cases, by the end of the course both externals and internals improved their self-image to 100 percent agreement or disagreement with a statement.

A greater percentage of externals liked themselves at the beginning of the course than did internals. Initially, 92.9 percent of the externals liked themselves, while 7.1 percent were unsure, and none disliked themselves. Originally, 88.2 percent of the internals liked themselves, 5.9 percent were unsure, and 5.9 percent did not like themselves. At the end of the course, 100 percent of both the externals and internals liked themselves.

Interestingly, when the statement was changed from "like myself" to "don't like myself," the initial responses differed. Initially, 92.9 percent of the externals still said they liked themselves, however

none were unsure, and instead 7.1 percent said they did not like themselves. At the beginning, 94.1 percent of the internals liked themselves, none were unsure, and 5.9 percent still said they disliked themselves. At the end of the course, 100 percent of both the externals and internals said they liked themselves.

Externals and internals differed somewhat in their responses to the item, "afraid of or hurt by others." Externals were less likely to be afraid of or hurt by others at the beginning of the course; 28.6 percent said that they were, 50 percent said that they were not, and 21.4 percent were unsure. By the end of the course, 14.3 percent of the externals were still afraid of or hurt by others, 64.3 percent were not, and 21.4 percent remained unsure. At the beginning, 35.3 percent of the internals were afraid of or hurt by others, while 41.2 percent were not, and 23.5 percent were unsure. At the end of the course, 11.8 percent of the internals were still afraid of or hurt by others, 70.6 percent were not, and 17.6 were unsure. Therefore, by the end of the course, a greater percentage of internals than externals reduced their fear of others.

An old proverb states that, "It is better to remain silent and thought a fool than to speak up and remove all doubt." It is often assumed that reticent individuals tend to be concerned about the value of their comments. With regard to this, the statement "usually say the wrong thing" was included. Initially, a greater percentage of externals than internals believe that they usually said the wrong thing. At the beginning, 14.3 percent of the externals said that they did,

64.3 percent said they did not, and 21.4 percent were unsure. At the end, 71.4 percent disagreed with the statement, none agreed, and 28.6 percent were unsure. Initially, 5.9 percent of the internals indicated that they usually said the wrong thing, 47.1 percent said they did not, and 47.1 percent were unsure. By the end of the course, 5.9 percent continued to think that they usually said the wrong thing, 94.1 percent said they did not, and none were unsure. Therefore, internals showed a greater shift toward believing that they usually did not say the wrong thing.

When the item read, "usually say the right thing," the responses again changed somewhat from the responses to the previous item. Externals now indicated that they were more confident about their comments. Initially, 42.9 percent of the externals seemed to believe they usually said the right thing, 14.3 percent were unsure, and 28.6 believed they did not say the right thing. At the end of the course, 71.4 percent of the externals agreed with the statement, and 14.3 percent remained unsure. (14.3 percent, or 2 people, did not respond to this item on the pre nor the post test.) At the beginning of the course, 29.4 percent of the internals claimed they usually said the right thing, 47.1 percent were unsure, and 23.5 percent felt they did not say the right thing. By the end of the course, 52.9 percent of the internals felt they usually said the right thing, 29.4 percent were unsure, and 11.8 percent disagreed with the statement. (5.9 percent, or one internal, did not respond to the item on the post test.) In general, externals were more likely than internals to agree with the statement, both at the beginning and the end of the course.

Fewer externals than internals initially agreed with the statement, "enjoy people." Externals began the course with 78.6 percent saying that they enjoyed people, and 21.4 percent were unsure. Initially, 94.1 percent of the internals enjoyed people, and 5.9 percent were unsure. At the end of the course, 100 percent of both externals and internals claimed that they enjoyed people.

When the item read, "don't like to be around people," externals were slightly more inclined to initially disagree with the statement than were internals. In this case, 14.3 percent of the externals now indicated that they did not like to be around people, only 7.1 percent were unsure, and 78.6 percent still liked being around people. By the end of the course, 100 percent of the externals indicated that they liked being around people. Internals also altered their opinion when the wording was changed. At the start of the course, 5.9 percent of the internals indicated that they did not like to be around people, 17.6 percent were unsure, and only 76.5 percent indicated that they liked being around people. By the end of the course, only 94.1 percent of the internals liked to be around people, and 5.9 percent did not. Hence, by the end of the course, externals were more inclined to like being around people than internals.

Externals were somewhat less likely than internals to agree with the statement, "people like to be around me." Initially, 50 percent of the externals believed that people liked to be around them, 50 percent were unsure. By the end of the course, 71.4 percent of the externals believed that people liked to be around them, and 28.6 percent were

unsure. Originally, 58.8 percent of the internals believed that people liked to be around them, 29.4 percent were unsure, and 11.8 percent did not believe that people liked to be around them. By the end of the course, 76.5 percent of the internals believed that people liked to be around them, and 23.5 percent were unsure. So internals were more likely to believe, both at the beginning of the course and the end, that people liked to be around them.

However, when the statement read, "people avoid me," externals were initially more likely to believe that people did not avoid them than were internals. At the beginning of the course, none of the externals believed that people avoided them, 7.1 percent were unsure, and 92.9 percent believed that people did not avoid them. By the end, 100 percent of the externals believed that people did not avoid them. Initially, none of the internals believed that people avoided them, 23.5 percent were unsure, and 76.5 percent believed that people did not avoid them. By the end of the course, 88.2 percent of the internals believed that people did not avoid them, 11.8 percent were unsure. Thus, by the end of the course, externals were still more likely than internals to believe that people did not avoid them.

Discussion of Results. At the onset of the course, externals were more likely than internals to like themselves, dislike themselves (due to the different responses to the statements "like myself" and "don't like myself"), believe that they usually said the wrong thing, and believe they usually said the right thing (due to the different responses to the statements "usually say the wrong/right thing"),

not like to be around people, and believe that people did not avoid them. Internals were initially more likely than externals to like themselves, dislike themselves, (again, due to differing responses to the statements "like myself" and "don't like myself"), be afraid of or hurt by others, believe the people liked to be around them, and enjoy people.

By the end of the course, externals were more likely than internals to believe they usually said the right thing, to be afraid of or hurt by others, and to like being around people. Internals were more likely than externals to believe that people liked to be around them, to feel unsure about whether people avoided them, and were more likely to believe they usually said the wrong thing. Moreover, externals and internals were equally likely to like themselves and enjoy people, by the end of the course.

In the areas where the internals' over-all initial self-image was less positive than the externals', the internals generally improved their self-image more than the externals. However, both internals and externals improved their self-image to some extent, by the end of the course.

Because this is an exploratory study, the authors will make no attempt to interpret the results of this investigation. Obviously, when using an N of 14 or 17 students, a shift of a couple of student responses can be somewhat misleading when reported as percentages. Moreover, the absence of one or two student responses to an item can distort the results even further. (Therefore, we have included a

table of the results expressed in numbers and percentages, at the end of the paper.) We do, however, suggest that experimental studies be conducted to determine: 1) the effect of basic speech courses on the self-image of students who experience communication anxiety, 2) how locus of control relates to changes in self-image, and 3) the relationship between locus of control and the reduction of communication anxiety.

We strongly suggest that reliability estimates for the Trait Checklist be established. Such estimates may well explain the seemingly contradictory responses we received to such items as "like myself/don't like myself," "usually say the right/wrong thing." However, it occurred to us that the problem may lie in the students' interpretation of the items. It is conceivable, for instance, that some students would be unsure whether they liked themselves <u>at all</u>, and yet <u>sure</u> that they <u>generally</u> disliked themselves, and vice versa. The students were given no option for indicating that sometimes they like/dislike themselves, only whether or not they were <u>sure</u> of their feelings. Likewise, some students may be sure that they don't "usually say the <u>wrong</u> thing," but unsure if they "usually say the <u>right</u> thing," and vice versa. Indeed, some students may feel that what they say is so insignificant that it doesn't warrant a value judgment; or even what they usually say is something very neutral and non-committal, and therefore, not right nor wrong. This lack of clarity may even have resulted in them purposely checking opposite responses to the same concept. Finally, the problem might simply disappear in the random error, if a larger N is used in an experimental study.

Summary. The Alternative Approach section of Speech 101 at Mansfield State College is designed to help students overcome the communication anxiety they experience while communicating in various situations. The course uses a modification of Phillips' (1977) goal-oriented rhetoritherapy procedure. Students work on two communication goals of their choice, take part in one round table discussion, and present one informative speech. The goals, as well as appropriate behaviors, are defined and rehearsed; the new behaviors are used in specific communication situations chosen by the students. The students were tested for their locus of control, using the REICS (Rotter, 1966), and were given pre and post tests on James and Jongewood's Trait Checklist (1971). Responses were then recorded and tallied according to the student's locus of control.

It is important to remember that the students choose the Alternative Approach section of Speech 101 in order to overcome their communication anxiety. We can assume that they were self-motivated to change behavior and attitude. This study suggests that both internals and externals made some improvement in their self-image during the course. There were, however, some differences in the degree to which internals and externals improved. It is our hope that locus of control will be examined in other reticence, and communication apprehension studies. Perhaps, then, instructors of basic speech courses can utilize the results of such studies to help students who experience communication anxiety by designing activities specifically for the students' locus of control. We hope that this paper will encourage further study of

communication anxiety, self-image, and the locus of control of students in the basic speech course.

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		EXTERNALS								INTERNALS							
Trait Checklist		Pre-Test				Post-Test				Pre-Test				Post-Test			
STATEMENT		Agree ✓	Un-Sure ?	Dis-Agree X	TOTAL	Agree ✓	Un-Sure ?	Dis-Agree X	TOTAL	Agree ✓	Un-Sure ?	Dis-Agree X	TOTAL	Agree ✓	Un-Sure ?	Dis-Agree X	TOTAL
Like Myself	#	13	1	0	14	14	0	0	14	15	1	1	17	17	0	0	17
	%	92.9	7.1	0	100	100	0	0	100	88.2	5.9	5.9	100	100	0	0	100
Don't Like Myself	#	1	0	13	14	0	0	14	14	1	0	16	17	0	0	17	17
	%	7.1	0	92.9	100	0	0	100	100	5.9	0	94.1	100	0	0	100	100
Afraid of or Hurt by Others	#	4	3	7	14	2	3	9	14	6	4	7	17	2	3	12	17
	%	28.6	21.4	50	100	14.3	21.4	64.3	100	35.3	23.5	41.2	100	11.8	17.6	70.6	100
Usually Say the Right Thing	#	6	2	4	12**	10	2	0	12**	5	8	4	17	9	5	2	16***
	%	42.9	14.3	28.6	85.8**	71.4	14.3	0	85.7**	29.4	47.1	23.5	100	52.9	29.4	11.8	94.1***
Usually Say the Wrong Thing	#	2	3	9	14	0	4	10	14	1	8	8	17	1	0	16	17
	%	14.3	21.4	64.3	100	0	28.6	71.4	100	5.9	47.1	47.1	100.1*	5.9	0	94.1	100
Enjoy People	#	11	3	0	14	14	0	0	14	16	1	0	17	17	0	0	17
	%	78.6	21.4	0	100	100	0	0	100	94.1	5.9	0	100	100	0	0	100
Don't Like to Be Around People	#	2	1	11	14	0	0	14	14	1	3	13	17	1	0	16	17
	%	14.3	7.1	78.6	100	0	0	100	100	5.9	17.6	76.5	100	5.9	0	94.1	100
People Like to be Around Me	#	7	7	0	14	10	4	0	14	10	5	2	17	13	4	0	17
	%	50	50	0	100	71.4	28.6	0	100	58.8	29.4	11.8	100	76.5	23.5	0	100
People Avoid Me	#	0	1	13	14	0	0	14	14	0	4	13	17	0	2	15	17
	%	0	7.1	92.9	100	0	0	100	100	0	23.5	76.5	100	0	11.8	88.2	100

*Decimal due to rounding process.
**14.3%, or 2 people, did not respond to this item; decimal due to rounding process.
***5.9%, or 1 person, did not respond to this item; decimal due to rounding process.